

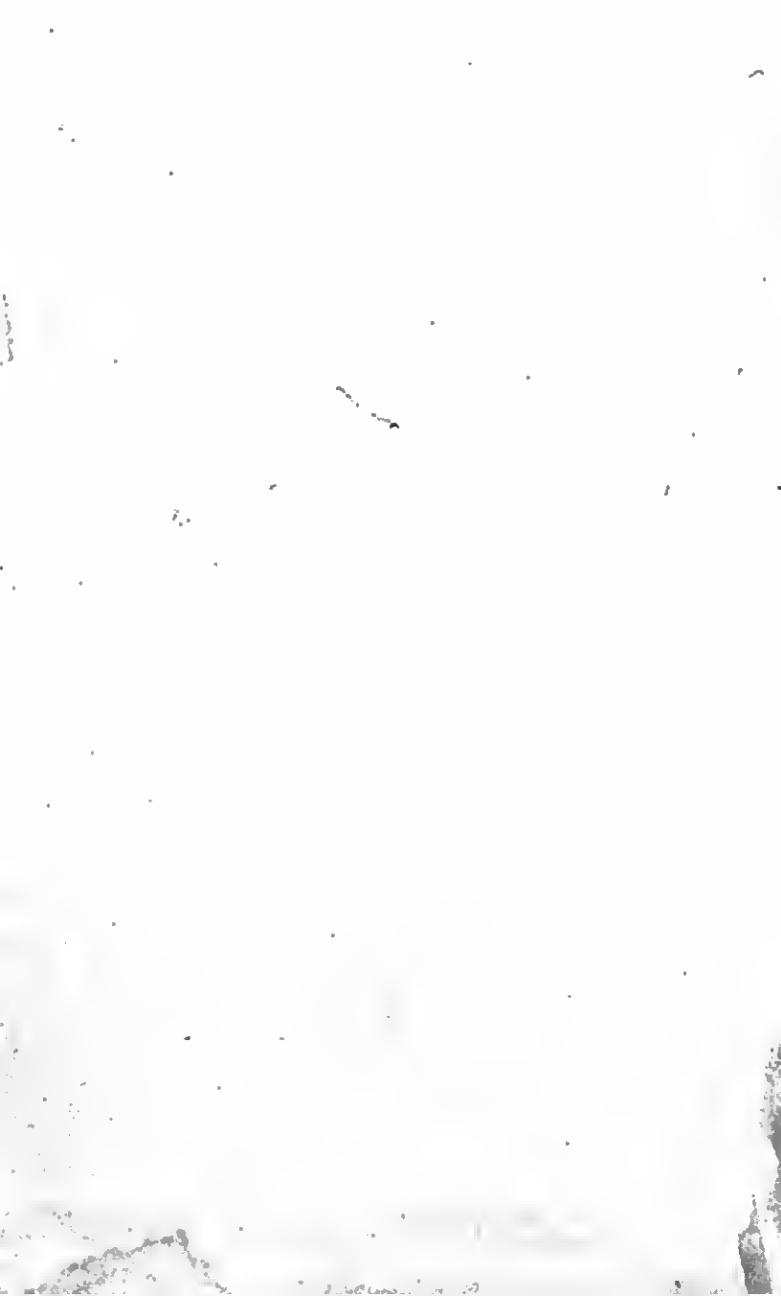
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Maharej-Kumar Sri Sudhansu Sekhar Sing Deo.



THE CHOHAN RULERS OF SONPUR

A Sequel to Orissa in the Making



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I. THE HISTORY OF THE BENGALI LANGUAGE (Published by the University of Calcutta), 1920. Price Rs. 5.

Opinion

Writes Dr. L. D. BARNETT in the *J. R. A. S.*, 1923:

Mr. Mazumdar's work on account of its learning, vigorous style, and bold deviation from currently accepted doctrine deserves a fuller notice than can be accorded to it here. Opening with a stout denial of Sir G. Grierson's theory of the origin of the Aryan Vernaculars, he maintains their derivation from the Vedic Language and explains their variations as due to the influence of non-Aryan speech, mainly Dravidian; in particular, Bengali, Oriya, and Assamese are in his opinion all primarily evolved from one and the same Eastern Māgadhī Prakrit, and the first two have been influenced in a secondary degree by Dravidian speech To us the most attractive chapters are II-IV, on the names of Vanga, and Bāṅglā, the geography of ancient Bāṅglā with the connected regions, Gāṇḍa, Rāḍha, and Vanga, VI on Bengali phonology, and VII-IX, a fine study of accent in Sanskrit and Bengali and of the Bengali metrical system, which is of special value as the author himself has won high distinction as a poet in his native language. On the whole, it may be said that the book is most stimulating and suggestive, and that it presents a remarkable mass of interesting facts relating to modern Bengali (p. 443).

II. TYPICAL SELECTIONS FROM ORIYA LITERATURE, 3 Vols. Published by the University of Calcutta.

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THE CHOHAN RULERS OF SONPUR

Chapter I

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE ~~THE~~ PRE-CHOHAN DAYS

This brochure relating to the Chohan Rulers of Delhi-Mainpuri origin, who have been holding their sway over some States in Western Orissa since 1400 A. D., is a sequel to the work *Orissa in the Making*, of which the writer of the following pages is the author. To clear up the situation of the founder or founders of Chohan supremacy in the Sambalpur Tract at the dawn of the 15th century A. D., some notable historical facts of that locality of the time anterior to 1400 A. D., are summarised below from *Orissa in the Making* :

1. The Sambalpur Tract signifies the whole area which lies between 19° and 22° north latitude and between $82^{\circ} 39'$ and 85° east longitude. It is comprised of the British District of Sambalpur and the States of Bolangir-Patna, Sonpur, Rehrakhol, Bamra, Raigarh and Sarangarh. Just to

the west of this area are the Districts of Bilaspur and Raipur which virtually constitute the Chhattisgarh Division in the Central Provinces. The States of Raigarh and Sarangarh as well as a big western slice of the District of Sambalpur have ceased to form now a part of the Sambalpur Tract since October, 1905 ; this clipping of the Sambalpur Area by the British Government for administrative convenience will be wholly ignored in speaking of the Sambalpur Tract of ancient time. Again, the District of Raipur will signify the whole area now covered by the Districts of Raipur and Drug in the Central Provinces. The term Chhattisgarh will be used to imply the District of Bilaspur and the whole of the District of Raipur as indicated above.

2. Leaving aside the history of the earlier days it may be asserted with some degree of certainty that by about the 7th century A. D. the kingdom of Dakṣiṇa Kośala was comprised of Chhattisgarh and the Sambalpur Tract. From the early part of the 8th century A. D. to about the middle of the 9th century A. D. the whole of this Kośala Empire was under the rule of a dynasty of Soma-vamśī Rajas. In a regular order of succession we get the names of Udayana,

Indrabala, Nanna Deva, Tivara Deva, Harṣa Gupta, and Bālārjuna of this dynasty who ruled Kosala by making Sirpur in the District of Raipur their capital.

3. The sons and successors of Bālārjuna (Mahāśiva) were ousted from Chhattisgarh by some rulers who made Sarabhpur their headquarters. Bālārjuna's successors made the Sambalpur Tract their kingdom and always designated this tract by the name Kośala, though the main trunk of Kośala consisting of Chhattisgarh fell in the hands of other rulers. The term Kośala occurring in the records of the successors of Bālārjuna signifies the Sambalpur Tract defined above.

4. Bālārjuna's great-grandson Janamejaya Mahābhava Gupta added by his conquest to his Kosala Kingdom the country of Tri-Kalinga. The word Tri-Kalinga has been explained in the records of Janamejaya and his son Yayāti to signify Utkala (the modern Districts of Balasore and Cuttack), Kongada *alias* Odra (the whole of the District of Puri), and Kalinga comprised of very likely the bulk of the District of Ganjam in the Madras Presidency. This Janamejaya, his son Yayāti and his grandson


Bhīmaratha, though Emperors of Kosala and Orissa, resided principally in the Kosala Country, and the town of Sonpur on the confluence of the Mahanadi and the Tel was made the capital of the Kosala Country. This fact has made Sonpur, the headquarters town of the State of that name, very historically noted. Janamejaya Mahābhava Gupta attempted after his conquest of Tri-Kalinga to build a fortified town on the left bank of the Mahanadi across the town of Cuttack; the four gates of the plan of that unfinished town have given the place the name Chowdwar.

5. Yayāti Mahāśiva Gupta, son of Janamejaya Mahābhava Gupta, is regarded in the Madla Panji chronicles (maintained in the Jagannath Temple at Puri) to be the first ruler of newly-organized Orissa consisting of Tri-Kalinga and Kosala. This ruler set up a pleasure-garden (called ārama in one of his charters) on the confluence of the Mahanadi and the Tel. At the north-eastern corner of this spot stands to-day the Temple of Rāmeśvara and a grove of mango trees. Yayāti's son Bhīmaratha Mahābhava Gupta terminated his reign very likely by the middle of the 10th century A.D. Definite

accounts of the successors of Bhīmaratha who built the famous Temple of Krittivāsa at Bhuhaneswar are not available. One remote successor of these Kosala Rulers named Uddyota ruled at Bhuhaneswar as an insignificant ruler during the early years of the 12th century A.D., when the Gangas of Mukhalingam in Ganjam became the real lords of Orissa. Uddyota granted Kosala to one Abhimanyu and this Abhimanyu and his successor Kumāra Someśvara ruled in Kosala with their headquarters at Sonpur, as the Kosala Country did not come under the suzerainty of the Ganga Rulers.

6. When the Ganga Rulers became lords of Orissa by the conquest of Chola Ganga in 1076 A. D., the Bhanjas of Gumsur and Kinedy extended their territory to Baud and Sonpur. It appears that the north-western open country of Baud was at this time included in the Sonpur State. At the termination of the rule of the two dynasties of the Bhanja Rulers some Varmans of Southern origin came into power in Baud and Sonpur till the State of Sonpur was conquered by Madan Gopal, the founder of the Chohan Rule at Sonpur, by about 1560. The bulk of the Kosala Country beyond the State of Sonpur

continued to be without kings from the middle of the 12th to the end of the 14th century, and Patna, Sambalpur and other States were being governed by councils of eight wise men called the At-mallik Government.



Chapter II

THE EARLY CHOHAN RULERS

There is a tradition in the form of a legend of quasi-mythical character that so early as the 12th or 13th century A. D., one Humern of the family of the Chohan Rajputs of Mainpuri in the United Provinces came to Patna with his wife who was then enceinte, and acquired there a position of some significance by his heroic deeds. It is also narrated in this legendary account that the son of Humern born in Patna State became by his mythical powers the chief of the eight Malliks who had the government of Patna and Sambalpur in their hands and thus established the Chohan Rule in the Kosala Country by being installed at Gad-Sambar. This tradition maintained in the Ruling Houses of Patna and Sonpur was secured by Mr. Impey in 1862 when he was the Deputy Commissioner of Sambalpur, and the whole account thus obtained was published in the *Central Provinces Gazetteer* in 1867. The historicity of this tradition must be very critically examined, for it is always unsafe to rely upon such accounts.

No doubt this tradition is very old, for the Bhonslas of Nagpur recognise the Chohan origin of the Rajas of Sambalpur and Sonpur in their official records of the 18th century, but that is not by itself sufficient to regard the fact as true. When in 1911 the author of the following pages recorded the tradition in his work entitled *Sonpur in the Sambalpur Tract*, he was not aware of those facts which prove almost to a demonstration that a Chohan Rajput Prince of the family of the historical Prithvirāj of Delhi did really establish a Chohan Rule at Patna towards the end of the 14th century A.D.

It has been recorded in the *Castes and Tribes of the Central Provinces* (published in 1916) that there is an important section of Rajputs in some villages in the districts of Raipur and Bilaspur, who claim to be of Chohan origin. When in April, 1917, this work of Mr. Russell came to the hand of the author of this work, he set about an enquiry relating to these Chohans with the help of some friends of his residing in Chhattisgarh, and the result he has thus achieved has been satisfactory. It may be stated on the authority of the record of Mr. Russell that these Chohans of Chhattisgarh are all illiterate people

and do not occupy any high or respectable situation in society. They have been employing themselves for generations together as labourers and village watchmen, but still they are proud enough not to touch any sort of food which is not offered them by a Brahmin. They employ only Brahmin priests to officiate at all religious and ceremonial occasions. They are only 700 souls according to the figures of the census of 1911 and do not know that in the Sambalpur Tract, there are aristocratic houses who may be called to be of their own kin. These highly degraded and illiterate Chohans of backward Chhattisgarh villages narrate this story that they came to the Chhattisgarh plains from *Mainpuri* as camp-followers and soldiers of a prince of their caste who had to leave *Mainpuri* in quest of a new country for himself, when the Pathan Mahomedans of Delhi made his situation very unsafe. This corroboration of the essential portion of the tradition maintained at Patna and Sonpur by such illiterate villagers of Chhattisgarh, regarding whom the Rulers of Patna and Sonpur have still no manner of information, is of great historical value.

When as a legendary account the origin of

the Sambalpur Chobans was recorded in the *Central Provinces Gazetteer* in 1867, the historian did not reject the account very rightly for this reason that it could not be possible for the Rulers of Patna and Sonpur to name Mainpuri of all places of Northern India as the place of their origin if there were no truth in the tradition. The fact is now established beyond doubt that it was a Rajput of the Mainpuri House of the Chohans who established the Chohan Rule in the Sambalpur Tract, but it remains to be ascertained as to when exactly this historical incident took place.

The political state of things as has been described in *Orissa in the Making* relating to Kosala makes it pretty clear that it could not at all prove an easy matter for any new dynastic rule to be established in the Sambalpur Tract previous to the middle of the 14th century. We examine, however, with the help of known facts as to when the Chohans did actually get a footing in the Sambalpur Tract. The Maharajas of Patna and Sonpur who are their direct descendants maintain genealogical tables from the earliest ruler downwards without any break. But as the duration of the reign of each ruler

has not been carefully noted, we have to examine some facts to establish a fairly accurate chronology.

We get in the traditional account referred to above that Ramāi Deo, the posthumous son of Humeru, became the leader of the At-mallik Government of the people without a king at Patna, and made Gad-Sambar his principal place of residence. It is also narrated that this Ramāi Deo of Chohan origin established his rule with the help of a Binjhal chief of Bora-Samhar, and that Binjhal chief was made a vassal zemindar of his. This man who was thus made a zemindar with the title Bariha to signify his position in the tribal language as the leader of the Binjhals is believed to be the ancestor of the zemindar family of Bora-Samhar, and became the first Bariha zemindar of Bora-Sambar.

We get in the *Nrisimha-Mahatmya* the names of thirty zemindars from the first Bariha to the present holder of the estate. The genealogical table of the Maharaj family of Patna gives us the names of 30 chiefs from Ramāi Deo to Maharaja Prithvi Sing Deo who died in January, 1924. This period of 30 generations cannot possibly be of greater duration than 500 years. This takes

us back to the end of the 14th or to the beginning of the 15th century. To be on the safe side we may fix 1400 A. D. to be the time when the Chohan rule was first established in the Patna State.

The date that has been fixed is not in conflict with what has been recorded in the Raj families regarding the duration of reigns of the rulers. It will also be seen that the subsequent facts of known times will not militate against the chronology which has been tentatively fixed.

R | Narasimha Deo, who is said to be the 12th Raja of Patna, ceded to his brother Balarām Deo the whole of the tract now covered by the district of Sambalpur. If 120 years be assigned to the 12 chiefs, Balarām Deo may be considered to have become the Ruler of Sambalpur in the year 1520. During the rule of Balabhadra Sāi, grandson of Balarām Deo, Madan Gopal, second son of Balabhadra Sāi, acquired the State of Sonpur very likely by ousting the Varman Rulers from the State. The family annals inform us that in consideration of his prowess the State of Sonpur was settled upon Madan Gopal by his father.

Maharaja Sir Bīr Mitrodaya Sing Deo, the

present Ruling Chief of Sonpur, traces his pedigree through an unbroken line of the Chohan Rajput Rulers who first established their sway over the whole of the Sambalpur Tract, and is the 12th Maharaja of Sonpur. As such the middle of the 16th century may be assigned as the time when Raja Madan Gopal Sing Deo became the founder of a new line of Chohan Kings at Sonpur. According to this history it will be correct to say that not only the State of Patna but also the State of Sonpur as well was acquired by the Chohans by conquest.

The Chohan Rulers of Patna became the rulers of the whole of the Sambalpur Tract, and extended their influence far and wide in the hilly tracts of Orissa and Gondwana. It has been recorded by Sir Alexander Grant in his *Gazetteer of the Central Provinces* (Ed. 1867) that the Chohan Chiefs of Patna became the head of a cluster of 18 forest states known as the "Aṭhāra Garjāt." That the suzerainty of the powerful Chohan Chiefs of Patna and Sambalpur was acknowledged by the Chiefs of Bamra (previous to the rule of the present line of Rulers), Gangpur, Bonai, Rehrakhol, Raigarh, Sarangarh,

Bindra-Nowagarh, Sakti, Bora-Sambar, Phuljhar, Baud, Atgarh, Panchgarh, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar, has been recorded at page 22 of the *District Gazetteer of Sambalpur* by Mr. L. S. S. O'Malley of the Indian Civil Service.

The Binjbal Zemindar of Bora-Samhar, who helped the first Chohan Chief in his acquisition of the State of Patna, was given the privilege of making *tika* to the Maharajas of Patna on the occasion of their accession to the *gadi*. That this custom was in force till 1803, has been admitted by the present Zemindar of Bora-Sambar in his recently published book *Nrisimha-Mahatmya*. The Gond Zemindars of Phuljhar admit that their ancestors were the vassal chiefs of the Chohan Maharajas. The people of Raigarh and Sarangarh affirmed at the time of Government enquiry that formerly their chiefs, who are Gonds, acknowledged the Maharajas of Patna as their overlords. It is reported that some old records disclose the fact that the Chohan Rajas of Patna and Sambalpur issued orders of demand of revenue from time to time upon some Chiefs of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj; it is regrettable that no trace of those records can now be obtained, though they were inspected either by Sir

A. Grant himself or by his responsible assistants some time previous to 1862.

This extensive power of the Chohan Chiefs was once instrumental in making Hindu civilisation prevail over a very large tract of country mainly inhabited by many rude aboriginal tribes. A new civilisation of a very advanced type now dominate the whole of India ; but what part the Hindu civilisation played in olden times to humanise many souls in the forest regions, should never be forgotten. The Maharajas of Patna and Sonpur are now the representatives of the powerful Chohan Rulers of olden days.

How very mighty the Chohan Chiefs were in the early days of their rule, can be gathered from the fact that though the Maharajas of Patna had but a nominal sway over the rude tribes of Bamra, it was through their agency that the rule of the Ganga-vamsi Ksatriyas was established in the wild tract of Bamra when the Bhuiyas and the Khands were contending to obtain supremacy there. It is worth noting that all the rude tribes accepted the rule of the Ksatriyas in those days very gladly without offering any opposition whatsoever.

We get in the legendary account of Kalā-pāhār's vandalism in Orissa that this half-mythical Hindu convert to Mahomedanism, though successful in his raids all throughout Orissa, was repulsed by the Chohan Rājās from the very borders of the Sambalpur Tract. The legend is of value to prove that in those days the Chohan Rājās were regarded very powerful by the people all over Orissa. It may also be noticed in this connection that when Govinda Vidyādhara, the faithless minister of Raja Pratāp Rudra Deva of Puri, slaked his thirst for power and blood by killing the two infant sons of his master, a young prince of the Ganga family ran away from Puri to obtain the safe shelter of the Chohan Maharaja of Patna. Again the significance of this fact can never be ignored that the Mahomedans, who became all powerful in the sea-board districts of Orissa, never thought of advancing to the borders of the Sambalpur Tract over which the Chohan rule prevailed.

Chapter III

THE EARLY CHOHAN RAJAS OF SONPUR

We have seen that at the commencement of the 15th century A. D., the Chohans of Delhi origin established their rule in the Sambalpur Tract and by about the middle of the 16th century Maharaja Madan Gopāl of this Chohan family founded a new dynasty at Sonpur. For convenience of reference the names of all the Ruling Chiefs of Sonpur are given here in a genealogical tree which is maintained in the Raj family :—

Madan Gopāl Sing Deo.

Lāl Sāi Sing Deo.

Purusottama Sing Deo.

Rāj Sing Deo.

Achal Sing Deo.

Divya Sing Deo.

Jarawar Sing Deo.

|
Sobha Sing Deo.

(son of Divya Sing and paternal uncle
of Jarawar Sing).

|
Prithvī Sing Deo.

|
Nilādhār (Nilādrinath) Sing Deo.

|
Pratāp Rudra Sing Deo.

|
Maharaja Sir Bīr Mitrodaya Sing Deo.

We have said that Maharaja Madan' Gopal, the first Ruling Chief of Sonpur, was very heroic and enterprising. He acquired his territory by force of his arms, and organized a liberal government which pacified all the subject races, including the aboriginal tribes at the frontier of the State. In his wisdom he respected the tribal gods of the subject races and made permanent arrangements for the performance of their worship according to the customary rites. Madan Gopāl's younger brother Bansi Gopāl was very much attached to him, and lived with him at Sonpur for some time.

Bansi Gopāl was very much religiously

minded, and was a devout worshipper of Visnu. With pecuniary help from his father and his elder brother Madan Gopāl he established the Gopālji *Math* at Samhalpur and the Rāmji *Math* at Puri, and endowed them with landed property.

Not Bansi Gopāl alone, but the whole family of the Sonpur Rulers has ever been noted for their devotion to Visnu. It is also to be noted that the Sonpur Rulers worship Sakti—the mighty consort of Mahādeva—as the family goddess, and worship regularly on all Mondays the god Mahādeva who is enshrined in the temple of Suvarnameru, though they become initiated by their *Mohanta* of Rāmji *Math* at Puri with Vaisnava *mantra*. It is the Vaisnava emblem which has ever since been maintained as the family insignia by all the branches of the Chohan Chiefs. This emblem is a *chakra* or discus, which is the mighty weapon of Visnu.

Lāl Sai Sing Deo, the son and successor of Maharaja Madan Gopāl, encouraged many Hindu settlers to come and settle in his State. It is stated that in his time the town of Sonpur became extremely flourishing. The length of the town of Sonpur was then from the temple of Ramesvar situated at the junction of the Mahanadi and

the Tel to the temple of Gokarṇeśvar on the Mahanadi, and the width of the town was from the temple of Suvarṇameru on the Tel to the bank of the Mahanadi. This area covered nearly 3 square miles, and was very thickly populated. Recent excavations at different places fully bear out the tradition of a bigger town.

It is curious to note that even now the town-criers, when proclaiming any Royal mandate, ask the imaginary 52,000 residents of the town of Sonpur to listen to the proclamation though the actual population is about 10,000 now. This form of proclamation having been handed down from generation to generation, it is uncertain as to when the town of Sonpur had an extensive population of nearly 52,000 ; it is not impossible that this tradition regarding a very large population has come down from the time of the Kosala Guptas.

It was in the time of Madan Gopāl Sing Deo that the temple of Suvarṇameru Mahādeva was built ; but as the town bore the name Suvarṇapur or Sonpur in the days of Janamejaya Mahābhava Gupta, it may be presumed that Suvarṇameru Mahādeva has been the principal presiding deity of the State since a very remote time. It

is highly important to note that the Thānāpati Malis have been the priests in all the temples in the Sambalpur Tract from a time which goes beyond the date of the establishment of the Chohan Rule ; it is in accordance with this long-established custom that the Thānāpatis are the priests in the temple of Suvarṇameru as well as in the Devi temple of Sāmlai. On special festive days the Brahmans officiate as priests in all temples. It is said by the people that once the God Mahādeva caused bits of gold to be showered in the State, and the people got those hits in the river-bed ; and it is for this reason, they say, that the god was named Suvarṇameru. It has been mentioned before that a small hill which bears an inscription and is situated in the bed of the Mahanadi, not far off from the palace of the Maharaja, is called Lankeśvari, and is worshipped by the boatmen when passing through the river. Similar to this Lankeśvari hill or boulder bearing inscriptions there is a boulder with inscriptions and footprints in the river near Sambalpur, and this latter is called the Rāma-Pada Rock.

Raj Sing Deo, the great-grandson of Lāl Sai Deo, married in the family of the Khimidi Rajas,

and his wife, of the Khimidi family, is reported to have carried with her the tutelary goddess, Khambesvari, of her Khimidi ancestors. As the question regarding the origin of this goddess is of historic and ethnic interest, the matter has been discussed at some length in a chapter in the *Orissa in the Making*.

After Rāj Sing Deo, Achal Sing Deo, the father of Divya Sing and Sobha Sing, became the Chief of Sonpur. Jarawar Sing Deo succeeded his father Divya Sing Deo, and reigned for one year only. He having died without any issue was succeeded by his paternal uncle Sobha Sing. Sobha Sing was succeeded by Prithvi Sing Deo of great historical interest.

One incident of the time of the father of Jarawar Sing Deo which is widely known in the State deserves a mention here. In those days, it is said, the State of Rebrakhol was regarded as directly subordinate to the State of Sonpur. It is narrated that a Raja of Rebrakhol did not acknowledge the overlordship of Divya Sing Deo and Ynvaraj Jarawar was sent out with a force to teach that Raja a lesson. When the first attempt of Jarawar Sing to execute his mission failed and he returned and encamped on

the bank of the Mahanadi opposite to Raj palace, Jarawar Sing's mother sent to him as a present a piece of Sari, which is a woman's wearing apparel, to signify that Jarawar was regarded as unheroic as a woman. Jarawar feeling ashamed at it proceeded again to Rebrakhol and this time he captured the Raja of Rehrakhol and brought him to Khandahata which has been identified with Khandaksetra of the early time epigraphic records.

Chapter IV

PRITHVI SING DEO AND THE OLD TIME STATUS OF THE CHOCHAN RAJAS

It has already been stated that the Chohans of the Samhalpur Tract conquered the territories which their descendants have inherited. Some incidents of the time of Prithvi Sing Deo will throw some light on the status and position of the Chohans in later times. It goes without saying that the Chohan Rajas maintained their thorough independence from the time of their acquisition of the States to 1745 when the Marathas of Nagpur subverted the Haihaya Kingdom of Bilaspur and Raipur. How the matters stood in Maratha times from 1745 to 1803 remains to be considered. Mr. C. Wills of the Indian Civil Service has brought to light many facts in his paper relating to Chhattisgarh published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1919 which have been helpful in determining many points of interest. The explanation which Mr. Wills has given of the Athāra-Gaḍ and the reflection which he has made

relating to the extra-territorial authority of the Patna Chiefs are worthy of serious consideration. Mr. Wills has shown that far from holding the Rulers of the Sambalpur Tract under subjection the Rulers of Raipur and Bilaspur did never even realise or demand any revenue from the Chiefs of the Chhattisgarh Area who were counted as subordinate Chiefs of the Haibayas.

The Sambalpur Area fell outside the territory constituted of Raipur and Bilaspur when the Sarabhpur Rulers came into power by about the middle of the 9th century A.D., and it is an undeniable historical fact that never did two Kosalas formed by virtue of the aforesaid separation reunite by establishing any kind of political relation. When the Marathas came into power in Chhattisgarh in 1745 they did not direct their attention to the Sambalpur Tract as that tract, which afforded them easy passage to Orissa and beyond, was not a strategic point with them. To subvert, or rather to uproot the Moslem Rule was what the Marathas aimed at, and as such Orissa Proper lying between two areas of Moslem influence, namely, the Northern Sircars and Bengal, was a strategic situation, and that situation the Marathas secured in

the course of five years from 1745 to 1750 A.D. If the Marathas were delayed in coming upon Orissa by being engaged in military operations in the Sambalpur Tract which was never in danger of being attacked by the Mahomodans from any direction, they would have surely failed to secure that advantage which they did by occupying Orissa Proper lying between the Sambalpur Tract on the west and the Bay of Bengal to the east. Not the sea-board tract of Orissa alone but the highlands of Orissa occupied by the Rajas who were all vassal chiefs of the Raja of Puri came under the power of the Marathas; all the Rajas of Orissa Garjat Mahals were all made to pay revenue very regularly to the Maratha overlord. It took some time for the Marathas from 1750 onward to secure and consolidate this position.

That the principalities of the Sambalpur Tract remained thoroughly independent during this time is proved by the fact that the Marathas after becoming masters of Eastern Orissa had to ask the Rulers of the principalities of the Sambalpur Tract to acknowledge the overlordship of the Bhonslas of Nagpur almost towards

the end of the 18th century. This happened when Prithvi Sing Deo, the great-grandfather of the present Ruler of Sonpur, became the Ruler of Sonpur at the age of 28. When by the demand aforesaid the independence of Patna, Sambalpur and Sonpur was threatened, the Chohan Rulers of all those States stoutly declined to accept the humiliating situation. The Maratbas who were mighty in those days became successful in capturing Prithvi Sing Deo and the then Ruler of Sambalpur. When the Rajas were made captive, payment of tribute was demanded by the Bhonslas, but this was declined to be paid by the people of those States. That it was really so is distinctly proved by the fact that Prithvi Sing Deo was kept as hostage by the Bhonslas for 17 long years. When, however, Raghunath Sing Deo, the then only son of Prithvi Sing Deo, died, the subjects of the State of Sonpur purchased the liberty of their Raja by paying a good amount to the Bhonslas. What was paid under these circumstances, cannot certainly be called a payment of revenue. It cannot be shown that any other payment of any amount was subsequently made by the State to the Bhonslas. To adduce positive proof that no tribute was paid by the

State some undoubted facts of the time may be mentioned. It was exactly when Prithvi Sing Deo was being released from his captivity that the Bhonslas entered into a treaty with the British Power and ceded to the latter the whole of Eastern Orissa with its Garjat Mahals, and only a short time after this the British overlordship was established in the Sambalpur Area. Again it has to be mentioned that Prithvi Sing Deo and Raghuji Bhonsla became sworn friends when the former was released by the latter. This tie of friendship still subsists between the Sonpur and Nagpur Houses. It may be recorded here just for the sake of the history of Sonpur that on his return to Sonpur Prithvi Sing Deo married Gundichā Devī who became the mother of the Ruler of Sonpur in 1837. It was in 1841 that Prithvi Sing Deo died.

It has been narrated in the interest of history how the Rulers of the States of the Sambalpur Tract with their record of thorough independence in pre-British times differ very essentially from those Rajas of the Garjat States of Eastern Orissa who (as the *Feudatory Gazetteer* by Cobden-Ramsay clearly shows) owe their origin, excepting in the case of the Ranpur State, to

grants in their favour by the Rajas of modern Orissa. In confirmation of what has been stated by citing the old-time history, a few facts ascertained by the British Government in this direction may be mentioned here.

The States of the five Ruling Chiefs of the Sambalpur Tract have only recently been taken out of the Central Provinces and have been placed under a Political Agent who is also the Political Agent of the Garjat Mahals of Orissa.

THE STATUS OF THE SONPUR CHIEF

As all the States now placed under one Political Agent are uniformly designated as the Feudatory States of Orissa, the distinction that exists in status between the group of Chiefs of the Sambalpur Tract and the group of Orissa Chiefs may be set out very clearly by quoting some sentences from Government Records as were published from 1863 to 1875.

Regarding the Orissa States, such as Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal and others, it has been remarked in Aitchison's *Treaties*, Volume III, that these States were the foudatories of Raghoji Bhonsla. On the reports of Mr. Ricketts

and Mr. Mills it was remarked by Sir Richard Temple that these States when ceded with the rest of Orissa by the Marathas to the British Government in 1803, "they were exempted from the operations of the General Regulation system prevailing in the British Provinces. This exemption was recognised on the ground of expediency only, and it was held that there was nothing in the nature of the connection of Government with the Proprietors that would preclude their being brought under the ordinary jurisdiction of the Courts, if it should ever be thought advisable." As a matter of fact the Chiefs of the Orissa Tributary Mahals were invested with certain powers by the British Government to try civil and criminal cases occurring in their territories, but the British Government gave the Chiefs to understand that their powers might either be increased or decreased by the Government of Bengal. As such all orders passed by these Chiefs were subject to revision by the Commissioner of Cuttack, to whom they were bound to submit the records of their cases.

But the Feudatory Chiefs of the Samhalpur Tract, namely, the Chiefs of the States of Patna, Sonpur, Kalahandi, Bamra and Rehrakhol,

exercise within their own States unlimited powers in Judicial and Executive administration. The powers exercised by the Sambalpur Chiefs are due to the inherent authority of the Chiefs, and not because these powers have been conferred upon them by the British Government, as in the case of the Chiefs of the Orissa Tributary Mahals. When the whole of the Sambalpur Tract came under the suzerainty of the British Government, a very careful enquiry was set about by the Government regarding the original status of the five Sambalpur Chiefs, and it was found that the Chiefs had been exercising full sovereign power in their own States from a very remote past. As such the British Government only recognised the Rulers of the Sambalpur tract as Feudatory Chiefs with full plenary powers.

It was however provided by the British Government, when entering into a treaty with the Chiefs, that the Rulers of the States of Patna, Sonpur, Kalahandi, Bamra and Rehrakhol would "have to refer capital sentences only to the Local Government, for confirmation." The circumstances under which this small limitation was imposed by the British Government have to

he explained. Previous to the time of British rule, mutilation of limbs is supposed to have been a form of punishment in vogue in those States for certain offences. Since the British laws, regarding the offences for which capital punishment may be inflicted, could not be enforced in the Feudatory States, the British Government had to provide some rules by virtue of which it could be ascertained whether the sentences of capital punishment were passed in deserving cases or not, and whether as a form of capital punishment mutilation of limbs of the prisoners would be ordered or not. This is why the Supreme Government provided in the preamble portion of the *Sanad* granted to the Chiefs that before executing the sentences of capital punishment the records might be sent for inspection and confirmation. Otherwise the Government does not interfere with any matter whatsoever in connection with the internal administration of the States.

This shows very clearly and definitely that, excepting in one matter of reference, the Ruling Chief of Sonpur and his other brother Chiefs in the Sambalpur Tract, are perfectly free to administer their own States with laws and

regulations promulgated by themselves, and are not invested with powers like the Orissa Chiefs by the British Government.

Sir Andrew Fraser the late Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, has made a mention of the higher status of the Sambalpur Chiefs at page 317 of the first edition of his work *Among the Rajas and Ryots* in connection with an incident with which the Maharaja of Sonpur was personally connected. This passage in the 1st edition of the book runs as follows :—

“A very interesting incident occurred in regard to the transfer of the five Oriya States (of Sambalpur) to Bengal. The Chiefs of these States had known me as the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces. They came to me as a friend and stated that they had three objections to the proposed transfer to Bengal. The first was their *powers and status as Feudatory Chiefs were higher than those of the Feudatory States of Orissa*, and that they feared that they might be reduced to the same level.....*It was easy for me to assure them, that as to their first difficulty their powers and privileges and status would be clearly and fully defined and recorded and that no diminution in any of them would occur.*”

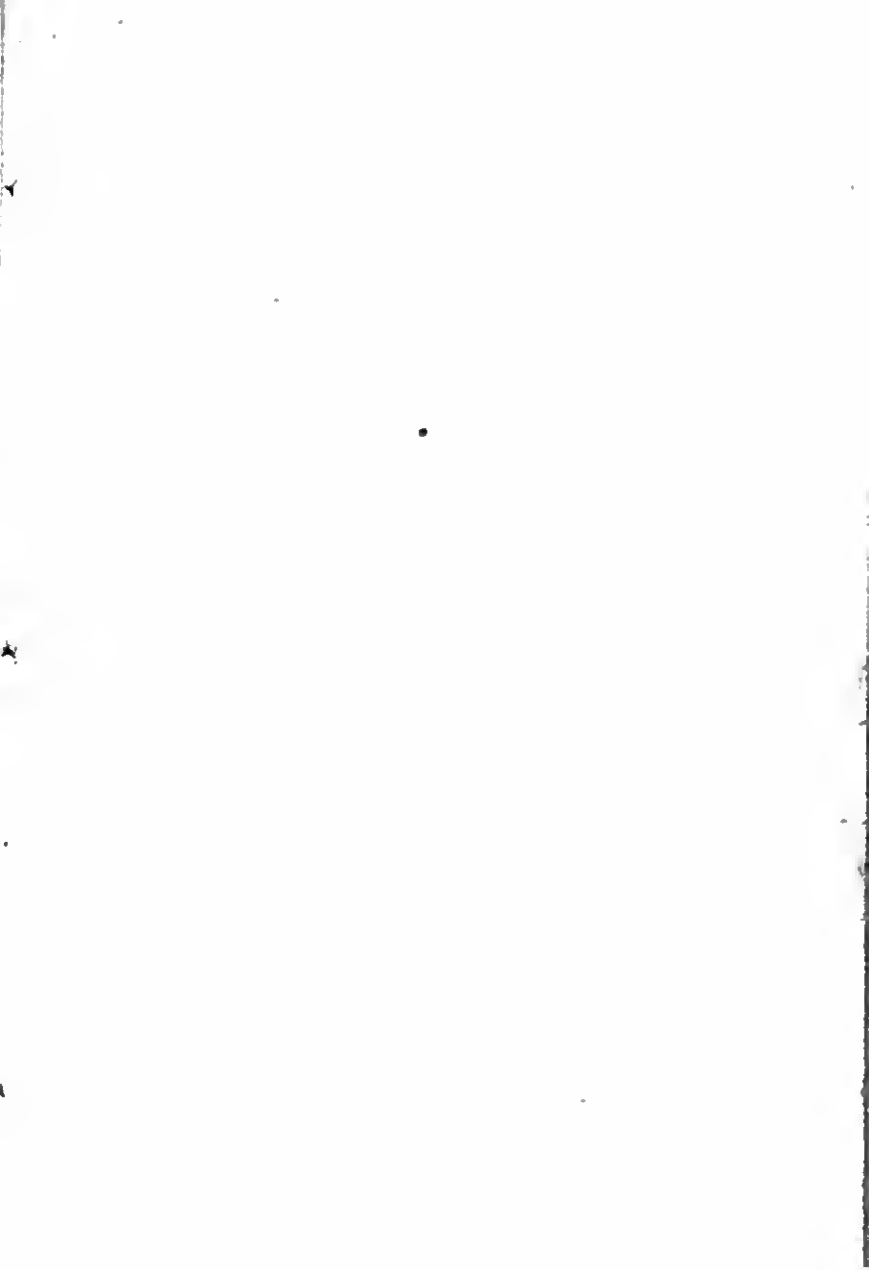
To illustrate how royal authority was being exercised in former times, one customary rule obtaining in the State of Sonpur may be recorded here. The Ruling Chief of Sonpur is, by virtue of immemorial customary rules, the head of all the caste associations in the State. All matters of caste disputes as well as disputes regarding religious offices, are referred to the Ruling Chief for his final authoritative decision. As it is all over India, so it is in Sonpur, the people of different castes are not bound together by habitual social intercourse. In the States of Samhalpur, the ethnical societies, as wholly separate genetic aggregations, are very well-marked. The people belonging to one caste form as it were a separate and independent organisation in the State of Sonpur. The different caste-guilds have their different caste *Panchayats* to decide all matters of caste disputes. These *Panchayats* are formed and appointed by the Chief himself, and the representatives of the caste-guilds are specially appointed by the Ruling Chief as the Headmen or *Pānuās*.

One section of the Goālās called Nanda Gours, are believed to have been brought into

the Sambalpur tract by the Chohan ancestors of the Sonpur Rulers. These Nanda Gours, even when they belong to the British district of Sambalpur and as such not bound to respect the authority of the Sonpur Rulers, do as a matter of fact refer all their caste disputes to the Sonpur Rulers, and submit willingly to the authoritative decision of the Rulers of Sonpur. It is personally known to the author that some other people of other caste of the British district of Sambalpur regard the authority of the Sonpur Rulers as highest and final in matters of their caste disputes. When for instance this question arose among the Keots of Sambalpur in 1897 as to whether a son begotten upon a girl of Karan caste by a Keot father could be taken into caste, the Keots sought the decision of the present Maharaja of Sonpur.

It has already been stated that the Ruler of Sonpur nominates and appoints the head castemen as Pānuās to represent the different caste-guilds to him, and to decide ordinary disputes under his authority and direction in their caste *Panchayats*. The ruler of Sonpur is thus the ruler and leader of all the subjects of his State,

and is the social and ecclesiastical head of all sections of people in his territory. This condition of things prevailed and in some cases still prevail in other States of the Sambalpur Area.





Niladhar Sing Deo,
The Maheraja's Grandfather.

Chapter V

RAJA NILADHAR SING DEO BAHADUR

It has been narrated that Gundicha Devi became the mother of Niladhar Sing Deo in 1837. In celebration of this happy incident she caused a temple to be built in the town of Sonpur which is now the highest temple in the State. The presiding god of this temple is Narsingnath, but as during the Ratha Yatra time the car of Jagannath is kept for a few days near this temple, the temple is called Gundīohā Gndī.

Gundicha Devi, the mother of Niladhar Sing Deo Bahadur, trained and educated the minor Chief very carefully, and did not allow him to mix with the people who generally seek to induce the Rajas to be pleasure-loving. In those days when the English power was not fully established in the Sambalpur tract, and no gentleman had any knowledge whatever of the English language, Raja Niladhar Sing Deo managed to educate himself in English. The writer of these pages saw Raja Niladhar in 1886. He

could speak English with ease and fluency, and took a good deal of delight in reading the popular historical works in English.

When during the years 1857 and 1858 the British Government had an anxious time in suppressing the mutiny of those days, Raja Niladhar Sing Deo was only 20 years old ; but the help he rendered to the English Government at this time was of great value. Subsequently, when a great disturbance occurred in the district of Sambhalpur, and a large number of misdirected people rebelled against the English Government under the leadership of Surendra Sai of Sambhalpur, Raja Niladhar Sing Deo did golden service to the English Government to bring about peace in the Sambhalpur tract. He also rendered great help to the British Government in quieting the mutinous disturbance in Baud created by the Khands headed by one Chakra Bisi. To quote the exact words on record of the British Government, there was "recognition of meritorious services rendered by him (Niladhar Sing Deo) to the British Government at a time when the Indian Empire had not settled down into the general peace and prosperity which it now enjoys. Times have changed

since Niladhar Sing loyally assisted the British Government in putting down rebellion and anarchy in the Sambalpur District."

Raja Niladhar Sing Deo Bahadur never travelled beyond the town of Sambalpur, where he had to come only once or twice at the invitation of the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces. Though his territorial experience was confined within the limits of the Sambalpur Tract, he knew much of the world by reading many books and newspapers. In 1874 he secured the services of a Bengali graduate, Prasannakumar Mitra, who was for some time the Head-master of the English school at Sambalpur. The principal object of employing this gentleman was to educate carefully in English his eldest son Raja Pratap Rudra Sing Deo Bahadur. Nowhere within the Sambalpur Tract and the Garjat mahals of Orissa, was there any attempt by any Chief to impart English education to the Raj-kumars so early as 1874.

From 1887 to 1891 he did not take much interest in the administration of the State for reasons known to him. He was far above the Dewans who were employed by the British Government during this period, in education and

intelligence, but he did not care to raise any word of objection against what these Dewans did. He observed strict reticence over the whole affair, and no one could know what led him to be indifferent to the State affairs. In 1886 he gave his eldest son Pratap Rudra Sing Deo some magisterial duties to perform with a view to make him familiar with the management of the State. The author of this book was then given for some time the special duty to render some help to Pratap Rudra Sing Deo in this matter.

Having come in personal contact with him, the writer of these pages can bear evidence to the fact that Rajn Niladhar Sing Deo Bahadur entertained very liberal ideas in respect of religious and social matters. It was during the rule of this Chief that Bhima Bhoi, the modern leader of the Alekh Religion, established his principal seat at Khaliapali in Sonpur. The followers of the Alekh religion, who are called Kumbhipatis, do not believe in the gods and goddesses of the Hindus, and do not observe any caste system. Raja Bahadur Niladhar Sing Deo never troubled them in any matter, but was rather helpful to them when they wanted to

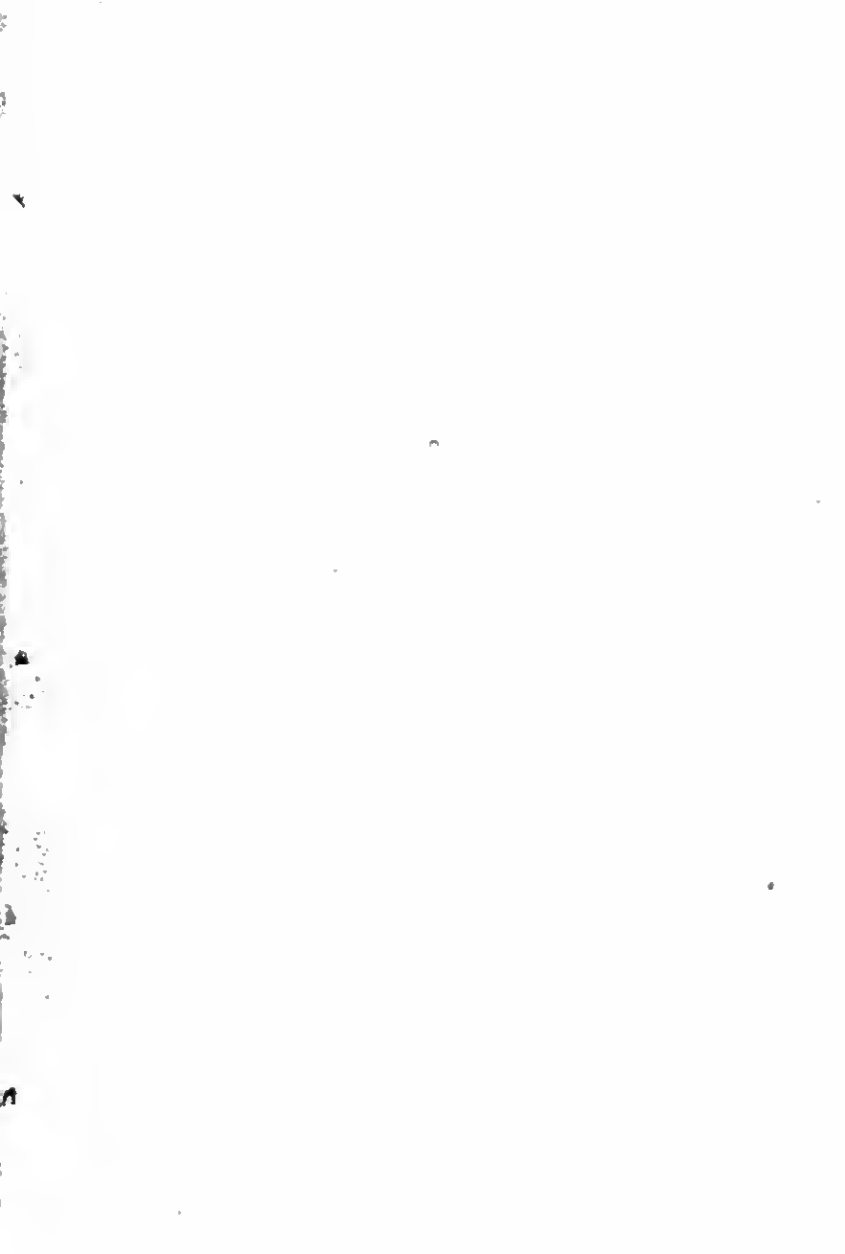
make Khaliāpālī their principal seat. The Knmbhipatiās were once put to some trouble by his Dewan, who was a Government officer, but the Raja Bahadur asked him to let the innocent religionists alone.

The Raja Bahadur was very fond of taking physical exercise, and could digest substantial dishes till his death in 1891. He was very fond of flowers, music and poetry, and composed many humorous Oriya songs of genuine literary merit. It is a pity that his effusions have not been preserved in a collected form. When he died he was 54 years old.

Raja Bahadur Niladbar Sing Deo was a man of strong determination, and never yielded to the opinions of others, however superior the position they might hold, unless fully convinced of the reasonableness of them. Sir Andrew Fraser the late Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, once remarked regarding him in the following words, when addressing the present Maharaja on a public occasion :

"It is a long time since I first visited the Sonpur State, and I have known intimately, three generations of its Rulers. When I first became acquainted with its administration, your

grand-father (meaning Niladbar Sing Deo) was the Ruler of the state. *He was a strong man*, but though we differed sometimes in matters of administration, our relations were always cordial, and we regarded each other as friends."





Prataprudra Sing Deo,
The Maharaja's Father.

Chapter VI

RAJA PRATAP RUDRA SING DEO BAHADUR

The life of Raja Pratap Rudra Sing Deo Bahadur is most interesting and instructive. He was the eldest son of Raja Niladhar Sing Deo Bahadur by his first wife Rani Durgakumari Devi, a daughter of Kumar Padmanath Sah Deo of the Chutia Nagpur Raj family. He was born on the full moon day of Ashārh of the Saka era 1775. This date corresponds to 22nd July, 1853. When Rani Durgakumari Devi died leaving her son an infant of about nine years old, Rani Gundichā Devi, the mother of Raja Niladhar Sing Deo Bahadur took upon herself the guardianship of the infant Jubaraj, and employed two educated Oriya Pandits to give him lessons in Oriya and Sanskrit.

When quite young, the home life was far from interesting to him, and he devoted most of his time to acquisition of knowledge by living in the company of his teachers. When a boy of sixteen, the Jubaraj was married to the eldest daughter of Maharaja Udit Pratap Deo of Kalahandi.

According to the custom of the Raj families, two or three young maid-servants came from Kala-handi in the company of his newly married wife, and these young maid-servants expected as a matter of right that they should be treated as wives by the young Jubaraj. But all the members of the Raj family were greatly surprised, when the Jubaraj declined to enter into the apartment of his wife, unless and until the young maid-servants would be altogether removed from the house. As the environment was not seemingly favourable for the growth of such a moral force in a young prince a little storm arose in the Raj family when this noble resolution was firmly proclaimed. The old order had to change to give place to the new. The novel procedure in the life of the Jubaraj was then widely discussed and criticised. It is true that a wife in a Raj family has to submit willingly to the situation of being one out of many on whom a Raja or a Rajkumar may be pleased to confer some favour. But however much the ladies of high rank may be used to such a life, they are sure to feel elated when their husbands live a life of purity. So greatly devoted the wife of Raja Pratap Rudra was to her husband

that she simply worshipped her loving husband throughout her life.

It has been the unwritten law that a wife in an aristocratic Raj-family should be superseded by another, if she fails to give birth to a son for a successor; for the main object for which a Hindu should marry is to get a son. *পুত্রার্থে ক্রিয়তে ভাৰ্য্যা* is the text in all the works of Smriti. When the first child of the young Jubaraj proved to be a daughter, Raja Niladhar Sing Deo Bahadur arranged for a second marriage for his eldest son; but the young Juharaj in his firm determination rejected the proposal and said that nothing could induce him to take a second wife. How this proposal endeared him to his wife, we can well imagine. But his father became greatly displeased, as in his idea the son was not obedient to his father. The Raja Bahadur, however, waited for the second chance; but this time too the mother of our present Maharaja was delivered of a female child. There was consternation in the Raj family over again, and Raja Niladhar Sing Deo became strongly determined to give another partner of life to the Jubaraj who might be lucky in the matter of bringing forth sons. Pratap Rudra Deo remained firm in his resolution, and

solemnly declared that he would not, under any circumstances, know any other woman for his wife, even though no son be born to him. By this determination he incurred the displeasure of his father, and his father never again became favourably disposed to him, though Pratap Rudra became subsequently the father of five sons.

When a cry of despair arose in the Raj family, the beloved wife of Pratap Rudra Deo commenced to observe fast on Mondays in the name of Suvarnameru Mahādeva with the desire that she might be blessed with a son. On the 8th day of the month of July of the year 1874 Jubaraj Pratap Rudra and his wife were actually blessed with the son who is now the Maharaja of Sonpur.

It was in the year 1874, that Niladhar Sing Deo appointed Bahu Prasanna Kumar Mitra as the teacher of his eldest son to give lessons in English to him. The education of the Jubaraj in English could not make much progress, as his teacher was given by the Raja Bahadur much official work to do. But the Jubaraj by then had become a scholar in Sanskrit, and had read almost all the ancient works of Oriya literature. Though

Pratap Rudra Deo was very capable, he was not given any chance to learn the work of State administration till 1886. The Jubaraj utilized this time in reading Sanskrit literature and in holding discourse with the learned men who resided at Sonpur.

The question the author of this work had to discuss with Jubaraj Pratap Rudra Sing Deo on the very first day of his meeting in 1886 was on the teachings of the Upanishads relating to the worship of Brahma in spirit. It seemed that the writer of these pages did not approach a Jubaraj in a palace, but came to the cottage of a Rishi. One day in connection with a lively conversation on the subject that men generally think it to be their duty to become religious only when grown old, the author of this book read to him and explained the poem of Robert Browning wherein the unbelieving and worldly spirit of a dying Bishop has been described to be giving orders for his tomb. He appreciated the piece very much, and with a pleasant smile on his lips said that men never forsake the pleasures of life until they feel that the world is passing out of their reach. The author of this book will always cherish the happy memory of many

pleasant evenings he passed with the Jubaraj in September, 1886.

Raja Bahadur Pratap Rudra Sing Deo ascended the *gadi* of Sonpur on the 9th day of September, 1891. From the very day he became the Raja and Feudatory Chief of Sonpur, he devoted his whole energy to bring about such reforms in the State as were calculated to help the subjects to grow in light and prosperity. Since his accession to the *gadi* to the present time the author of this book has been intimately connected with all the affairs, of the Raj family, and has consequently full personal knowledge of many facts which have been recorded in this work.

Our present Maharaja who was then the Jubaraj, was 17 years old when his father became the Ruler of the State. By this time Jubaraj (now Sir) Sri Bira Mitrodaya having completed his course of school education, was employed by his father to take part in the administrative work of the State. The Jubaraj was not given, as is usually done elsewhere, to do some desk work only in connection with judicial administration. As the Raja Bahadur wanted to make a land-settlement in the State,

he employed the Jubaraj to learn practically the work of survey and settlement under his own officers. The Jubaraj most willingly did the work, and moved about on foot from field to field to learn the work of survey. This noble example was shocking to many neighbouring Chiefs; for, in their idea, a Raja or a Rajkumar should not condescend to do such work.

In order to be able to carry out effectually his scheme of reform, Raja Bahadur Pratap Rudra Sing Deo requested the Government of the Central Provinces to lend to his State the services of Rai Sahib Dinahandhu Patnaik, regarding whom the Raja Bahadur had once the opportunity of forming a favourable idea. When the Government in response to the requisition allowed Dinabandhu Patnaik to become the Dewan of the State, Mr. Patnaik executed the whole work of administration with the greatest zeal and energy. In recognition of the good service done by him, Dinabandhu Patnaik was given the title of Rai Sahib by the Government, when to the hereditary title of "Raja" of his kind (master, the Feudatory Chief, the title of "Bahadur" was added by the Government.

During the ten years of his rule, new roads

were laid out to facilitate easy communication with the centres of trade and civilization, new settlement was made to give the subjects some well-defined status, many schools were established in the town and in the villages, and new buildings were constructed to give respectable accommodation to the Judicial and Executive officers to hold courts and to keep offices. The jail building was also reconstructed in his time on a new plan. Referring to the works of reform and the good administration of the State, the British Government addressed Raja Pratap Rudra Sing Deo in these words :

“As your father was associated with the British Government in introducing an era of peace into the country, so you, Raja Bahadur, have loyally co-operated with the Government in maintaining peace, by establishing in your State a sound and wholesome administration under which the rights and happiness of your people are assured.”

A special paragraph has been reserved to speak of what the Raja Bahadur did to spread education in the State. As a real respecter of the other sex, he established one efficient school

for the education of the girls in the town, though the people even now do not care much to educate their girls properly. He established scholarships to help the boys of the Sonpur English school in their further higher education elsewhere. He took particular care to get information as to the progress of education in village schools where the children of the agriculturists received education. As a lover of Sanskrit literature he established a Sanskrit school in the town to educate the children of those Brahmans who have to deal with the Hindu Sāstras.

Without appointing a specially qualified teacher for the Jubaraj alone, he established a Raj-kumar School where all the boys of the Raj-family commenced to receive education under a competent teacher.

The wisdom he showed in the administration of his State in all directions, the kindness of heart with which he treated all the members of his family, the charitable and liberal disposition with which he met all public demands, and the sweetness of temper and the purity of character which he maintained in his public and private life, made him dear to all alike.

Almost towards the end of his career a widespread famine prevailed all over the Chattisgarh Division of the Central Provinces. During these days of famine the Raja Bahadur himself moved about with his Dewan and the Jubaraj to supervise carefully the relief works which were opened at different places in the State. The energy with which he did this work will never be forgotten by the grateful subjects of Sonpur.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that Raja Pratap Rudra Sing Deo Bahadur was an ideal husband, an ideal father and an ideal ruler of a State. His faith in God and faith in man made him perfectly happy during the days of his sojourn in this world. He was gathered to the fathers on the 8th day of August, 1902.

Chapter VII

THE PRESENT RULER

The history of the brilliant career of Saptasri Maharaja Sir Bir Mitrodaya Sing Deo Dharma-nidhi, Gnangunakar, K.C.I.E., who, adorns today his high and exalted situation as the Ruler of the Sonpur State and will continue to do so for many years to come, deserves to be recorded in letters of gold in the annals of Sonpur Maharaj family, for, by his memorable deeds of effective loyalty to the British Throne and by his beneficent measures calculated to do immense good to his subjects has won a high renown for the Sonpur State for all future time.

By his exemplary loyalty, patriotism, charity and wise State administration, he has endeared himself to the British Government, to the people of India in general and to the people of his own State in particular. His good deeds have been creating for him an evernascent monument which will shine in future with ever-increasing brilliance, for hardly a year passes when he does

not do something new to add to his glory and to the happiness of the people whom he has been destined to rule.

The enjoyment by his ruling house of the hereditary title of Maharaja and the honour of a permanent salute of 9 guns, has been secured by him by his wise and beneficent administration. It is singularly noticeable that as a worthy partner of a worthy husband, his wife Maharani Lady Parvati Devi has become noted for her acts of private and public charity and the British Government in recognition of her patriotic and virtuous deeds has decorated her with the Kaisar-I-Hind Medal, 1st class. It is also an uncommon good fortune to the Chohan Maharaj family of Sonpur and to the people of the Sonpur State that Maharajkumar Sri Sudhangsu Sekhar Sing Deo the heir-apparent to the State and the loving son of the Maharaja and the Maharani has distinguished himself as early as now as a thoroughly capable administrator of the State by taking upon himself the hulk of the hurden of State administration.

Above all titles and honours Maharaja values the good education, humane virtues and administrative wisdom of his son who at a far distant

date will assume the reins of government of his State. Again, Maharaja values greatly the most precious boon that God in his merciful dispensation has granted him as the highest reward in his life by having made him the grandfather of the first born son of his son, Sriman Tikaet Lal Bir Pratap Sing Deo. The writer of these pages records these facts being happy in the happiness of the Maharaj family.

This wise and noble ruler of the State ascended the Sonpur *Gadi* of the Chohan Rulers at his 28th year on the 8th day of August, 1902. It has been mentioned before that during the rulership of his illustrious father, he actively participated in the judicial and executive administration of the State, and was, as his highly educated son Sriman Sudhanghsu Sekbar is to him today, the chief councillor of his father in all matters of private and state importance.

The political officers of the Central Provinces formed a very high opinion of his ability and education during this period of his training as an administrator. What the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces of those days said regarding him in his speech addressed to the late

ruler of the State may be quoted in this connection ; the words are :

“Most of all do I congratulate you, Raja Bahadur Pratap Rudra Sing Deo, on the excellent reputation won by your eldest son. You have always insisted on the importance of his being fully instructed in all branches of the administration, and your wise policy has been crowned with success. I have spent hours with Jubaraj since I crossed your border. I have been most favourably impressed with the intelligence, energy and zeal and with the excellence of his character.”

What the boro of this chapter has accomplished since the day of his accession to the *Gadi* will only be very briefly narrated, and all statements relating to his deeds will be tried to be supported by the words of the political officers who had ample opportunities of knowing all the conditions of the administration of the Sonpur State.

The wonderful progress the State made in the course of the first six years of his rule led the British Government to honour him by decorating him with the title of Maharaja. At the time of conferring upon him the title of Maba-

raja, Sir Andrew Fraser the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal addressed him in the following words of high praise in the Durhar at Belvedere :

"It was thirty years ago that I first visited Sonpur, and ever since I have been on terms of friendship and intimacy with your house. It has been a great pleasure to me to see *the excellent example which you have set to all the Chiefs of Orissa*. You enjoy the character of a good ruler, shrewd, economical, just and reasonably progressive. Since your State was attached to Orissa in 1905, you have been under the Government of Bengal ; and I, as the head of this Government, have to thank you *not only for the generally good administration of your State, but also for the help you have given me in making arrangements connected with the reconstitution of Orissa.*"

Only a few months after his taking the reins of the State in his hand, the Maharaja had to proceed to Delhi to attend the Coronation Durbar which was held in January, 1903. He visited at this time all the towns of historical note and all the celebrated holy *tirthas* of the Hindus in Upper India, when the Durbar at Delhi was over. And since then, for the purpose

of enjoying rest and for recruiting health after continued work in the State and again to acquire religious merit by visiting the sacred places, he has travelled a good deal all over the country from Darjeeling in the Himalayas to Ramesvar at the southernmost point of India, and from the cities of Lahore in the Punjab and Bombay on the West coast to the limits of the East coast of India.

The British laws being not in force in the Feudatory State of Sonpur, the officers of the Court had generally to administer justice taking a common sense view of things. It is well-known that what is called common sense is not very common enough. To avoid all difficulties and to give the State officers as well as the subjects some definite rules to rely upon, he first codified the law regarding Tenancy and Land Revenue in a well considered work entitled *Bhumibidhi* and then framed rules and regulations relating to all matters of civil and criminal administration. The originality he has displayed in organizing various departments of administration is rarely met with.

The subjects of Sonpur had to borrow money and *dhan* to conduct agricultural operations,

from professional money-lenders, who ruin the agriculturists by demanding rather an extortionate rate of interest. The contracts being legally valid they had to be enforced in the Law Courts of the Maharaja. To save the agriculturists from this ruinous condition of things, the Maharaja has himself established loan offices at different centres of the State, where the needy subjects can get money and grain on a moderate rate of interest. One cannot speak too highly of the far-reaching effect of this beneficial measure.

Accounts of the creation of permanent funds to help the agriculturists very substantially in the matter of irrigation of fields, to protect and educate the orphans of all classes of people, to reach medical ministrations to the poorest of the poor, and to give liberal education to those who are capable of receiving it, cannot be given at once without mentioning at first some incidents with which some funds have been associated.

The incident which has to be mentioned first is a very sad one. In October, 1918 when the great European War was coming to a termination, the eldest son of Maharaja who was then

the Jubaraj, was snatched away by the cruel band of death. The late Jubaraj Somabhusan Sing Deo was only 22 years old and not even full 6 months expired since the date of his marriage when this lamentable event took place. The sad and mournful aspect of this heroavement should not be tried to be depicted. Somabhusan Sing Deo was educated with greatest care. He passed the Matriculation Examination of the Calcutta University in 1915 from the Maharaja High School at Sonpur and received further education in the Presidency College, Calcutta. In the expectation that he would be called upon in a future time to administer the State of Sonpur he was taken out from the Presidency Collego and was given to learn the work of State administration, when by divine dispensation the matter was decided against the fond expectations of the loving parents. Some measures of abiding interest have been formulated to perpetuate the memory of the late Jubaraj. All charitable and provident provisions made by the Ruling Chief will be mentioned later on ; it should only be recorded here that the school at Sonpur which has been established to train physicians has been named after the name of the late Jubaraj, and

a very rich endowment has been made in his name to found an orphanage to give shelter and education to all the orphans of the State. The last named institution with its munificent provisions may fairly compare with similar institutions established elsewhere in the country-places in India. It will be seen with reference to the institutions just named and by referring to other charitable and beneficent measures to be mentioned later on that the souls of the Maharaja and the Maharani Saheba have been greatly humanised by their deep distress.

Sriman Maharajkumar Sudhangsu Sekhar Sing Deo who has now become the Juharaj and heir-apparent to the State, was prosecuting his studies in the Calcutta St. Xavier's College when the hereavement spoken of above took place. Maharajkumar Sudhangsu Sekhar passed the University Matriculation Examination from the Maharaja High School at Sonpur with singular distinction by being placed high in the 1st division, and had only a very short time before him to appear at the Intermediate Examination of the University, when he was called upon to take upon himself the duties of the State Administration under the guidance of the Maharaja.

The principal and two professors of the St. Xavier's College communicated to the State at the time of Sriman Sudhangsu Sekhar's leaving the College that they entertained surest expectation of their beloved pupil's success in the Intermediate Examination in Arts. It has been mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this chapter that there is no branch of State administration which is not being practically managed by Sriman Sudhangsu Sekhar with greatest efficiency under the guidance and instructions of his father the Ruler of the State. He has been pursuing all the State works with the perennial flow of youthful energy.

To speak of the traditional loyalty of the Sonpur House to the British Throne, about which much has been said on different occasions by Sir Edward A. Gait, the retired Lt.-Governor of Bihar and Orissa, the acts of Maharaja during the great European war may be briefly mentioned. Just at the outbreak of that war on the 5th day of August, 1914, Maharaja Sir Bir Mitrodaya, like a true hero of the Chohan Race, offered his personal services to the British Government and placed all the resources of his State, with no equivocation, under the disposal of the government.

With the greatest appreciation of the gifts of the Maharaja, Sir Edward A. Gait mentioned on two occasions that he valued the gifts of the Maharaja more than the richer gifts and donations of richer people since he thought that what Maharaja paid was very high in consideration of the limited resources of his State.

The letter which Sir Edward A. Gait wrote to Maharaja on the eve of his retirement is reproduced below to show how Sir Edward held the Maharaja in high esteem and how he valued his friendship. The letter runs :

“ Government House,
Patna,
the 27th December, 1920.

My esteemed friend,

I must write a few lines before leaving India to wish you farewell and a long and happy career. I have known you for many years and have always regarded you as a sincere friend of myself and a loyal supporter of the British Government. During the war you did everything in your power to help the Government and you set an excellent example to your brother Chiefs. Your Maharani also did her best to assist in various ways.

Your services have been recognised both by the grant of a salute and by the title of K.C.I.E. and I should like to take this opportunity of thanking you once more for all that you have done.

I hope that you will write to me from time to time and let me know how you are getting on.

With all good wishes,

I remain,

Your sincere friend

Sd. E. A. Gait "

What Mr. L. E. B. Cobden-Ramsay the then Political Agent of the Orissa Feudatories, has said regarding the various gifts of the Maharaja is quoted below. The following letter of Mr. Cobden-Ramsay was written to the Maharaja when the title of Maharaja was made hereditary in the Sonpur family :

“ Office of the Political Agent,
Camp Bangriposi,
the 20th January, 1921

My dear Maharaja,

I must apologise for not having written you before to congratulate you on the distinction

of Hereditary Maharaja which was bestowed upon you at the New Year's honours. I had however the greater pleasure of personally offering you my congratulations but I feel I would also like to write to you and say how glad I am that this high honour has been bestowed on you. I am well aware that the reason you attach such value to the title now given you, is that it is a permanent honour which descends to your son and heirs and adds to the continued prestige and honour of the Sonpur State and you feel that is far more than any personal honour to yourself.

You have, I need hardly say, deserved the honour and title that has now come to you. Your loyal, patriotic and untiring efforts to do all in your power to assist in the successful prosecution of the war, acted as a great incentive for others to follow and imitate. I need not recount the various and munificent subscriptions made by yourself and your Maharani Saheba to war objects and investments in war loan, for they are too well-known to require reference by me. *The great assistance you rendered in the supply of rice to the riverine States at cheap rates during the famine of 1919 was of untold value and assistance to the States affected, and very*

largely relieved and helped us in the grave situation we had to meet. Since then you have in the same way *helped the flood-affected areas in Puri*. Your high patriotism and public spirit have received recognition in the title of Hereditary Maharoja and I take this opportunity of offering you my sincerest congratulations.

^ Yours sincerely,

(Sd.) L. E. B. Cobden-Ramsay."

Some lines of the letter have been italicised to show that not to help the Government alone, nor to secure the happiness and prosperity of the subjects of his State alone, that the charities of the Maharaja and his Maharani have been directed. The well-being of the people of Orissa in general have been a matter of anxious consideration with the Ruling Family of Sonpur. The munificent donation of Maharoji Lady Parvati Devi, who has recently been decorated for her charities with the distinction of Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal, has been the first of its kind in Orissa; the creation of a chair by her in her

name in the Post-Graduate Department of the Ravenshaw College at Cuttack had the effect of speedy opening of post-graduate classes in the Ravenshaw College.

It will be seen in the brief list of charities appended below how the present Ruler of Sonpur has been helping the people of his State in various ways. It should be mentioned here that Maharaja¹, without confining himself to his own province, has made liberal donations elsewhere to further those noble objects for which he has a genuine love. His love for his mother-tongue induced him to make liberal grants towards the printing of the "Typical Selections from Oriya Literature" published by the Calcutta University. With a liberal donation he has founded a chair in the Post-Graduate Department of the Calcutta University for teaching Oriya as the principal subject in the M. A. Examination. He has donated a good amount to the Ayurvedic Institution recently established at Delhi.

By actively co-operating with the Research Society of Bihar and Orissa founded by Sir Edward A. Gait, the late illustrious governor of the Province, the hero of this chapter won

the admiration of the founder, and this is why he has been made a vice-patron of the Research Society. It may be mentioned in this connection that the Maharaja has presented to the Museum at Patna a beautiful marble bust of Sir Edward A. Gait. At the unveiling of this bust in the Museum, Hon. Sir Henry Wheeler, the present Governor of Bihar and Orissa, spoke of Maharaja and his Maharani in very high terms of praise.

Before summarizing some notable charities herounder, it may be mentioned generally that by donating 10 lakhs of rupees from his private funds Maharaja has created some permanent funds from the interest of which, not only all the institutions established by him will be permanently supported, but the solvency of the whole State will be perfectly secured against all contingencies.

To enumerate the beneficial measures of the Maharaja, the item which should be first mentioned is the Bir Pratap Sing Deo Irrigation Fund created with a capital of 2 lakhs of rupees. The name which this fund bears is the name of Maharaja's infant grandson Tikait Lal Sahab. The happy memory of the birth of his



Tikait Lal Sahab Sri Bir Pratap Sing Deo.

grandson has been perpetuated by it. The agriculturists have been given the privilege of taking money from this fund to excavate tanks, etc., and to irrigate the cultivated fields.

The next fund is the Famine-Relief Fund, the object of which is distinct and clear from the name itself.

Having spoken already of the beneficial institution of orphanage, the measures relating to education may be briefly noticed here. A large number of free primary schools has been established all over the State and education of girls has not been unprovided for. Besides many middle schools, a first-class High School is being maintained with an efficient staff.

For the maintenance of this High School a permanent endowment has been made of the amount of 1 lakh and 62 thousands. To educate his subjects and to get fully qualified officers for the State in the State itself, the Maharaja is spending a large amount of money every year. For the college education of the deserving boys of the State a large number of scholarships has been provided for. A good Sanskrit school is maintained for general Sanskrit education and institutions to teach Hindu Astronomy, Hindu

religious hooks and the Hindu system of medicine have been established in the Sonpur Town. Pages might be filled with the enumeration of the various permanent charities of the Maharaja and his Maharani.

Two charitable dispensaries equipped with first-class appliances and apparatus are maintained at the towns of Sonpur and Binka. These two dispensaries have not been much in need of special grant as the municipalities of the towns of Sonpur and Binka are rich enough to maintain them. The newly-opened charitable dispensary at the newly-created sub-divisional town Birmaharajpur having been in want of pecuniary support, Maharaja has created a fund for the upkeep of the dispensary by donating a large amount of money.

Both the Maharaja and the Maharani have been great supporters of the "Maternity and Child Welfare League," and for liberal donations to the funds of the organization the Maharaja has been made a Vice-President of it. Of the nobility of the province of Bihar and Orissa the Maharaja of Sonpur alone enjoys the honour.

Provisions have been made in some Trust Funds that from the proceeds thereof various

industries in the State may be supported. The people of the State pursue various useful industries, but only one skilled industry which has won a good reputation in the Wembley Exhibition of 1924 is mentioned here, namely, the industry of weaving high-class silk cloth. Of this class of goods there has been a heavy demand by the people of Europe. Nothing but facts as may be verified by any man at any moment have been mentioned all throughout this chapter.

For his devotion to religion and for his liberal support to ancient institutions of learning the Maharaja has won two titles from two respectable societies. The Muktimandap Sabha attached to the Jagannath Temple at Puri has decorated him with the title of Dharmanidhi, and the Bangiya Sauskrita Mahamandal has honoured him with the title Jnanagunakar. These titles declare how outside his own province Maharaja has been known to and respected by the learned people.

The story which will be a continued one, cannot be said to be concluded with the concluding lines of this chapter. The writer closes the narrative with the prayer that Maharaja Sir

Bir Mitrodaya who has won the love and admiration of his friends and his subjects and has been a trusted friend of the British Government may live long in good health to rule his beloved people and that his descendants as noble worthy representatives of the Chohan family may rule the State of Sonpur with ever-increasing prosperity for ever and ever.



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